

Sexual Assault Task Force

Report to Springfield City Council

November 12, 2019

Sexual Assault Task Force Members

- Members:
 - Sharon Alexander, Legal Services
 - Sara Bargo, Me Too
 - Brandi Bartel, The Victim Center
 - Phyllis Ferguson, Mayor Pro Tem
 - Jan Fisk, Council Member
 - Dee Ogilvy, National Organization of Women, SW MO Chapter
 - Linda Saturno, Child Advocacy Center
 - Janice Thompson Gehrke, Community Representative

Acknowledgements

- Acknowledgements:
 - Chief Paul Williams and the Springfield Police Department
 - Dan Patterson and the Greene County Prosecutor's Office
 - Cox Health SANE program
 - Mercy SANE program
 - Others who contributed information to the SATF

Task Force Charge

- The task force was charged with:
 - Reviewing current city practices
 - Researching best practices for prevention, reporting and investigation of SA
 - Reviewing/recommending training & education opportunities for first responders and service providers
 - Considering and recommending need for a public education campaign
 - Recommending ongoing plan to measure future progress

Background

- Key background information:
 - Sexual assault impacts all persons
 - Sexual assault numbers on the rise in Springfield, even when adjusting for change in FBI definition and reporting.
 - Increased from 266 in 2014 to 336 in 2018, a 26% increase in five years.
 - Springfield has taken many positive steps:
 - Increased training \$\$ and two imbedded Advocates at SPD
 - Creation of the Family Justice Center
 - Expansion of the Crimes Against Persons Unit
 - Waiver of incident report fee for victims of sexual assault
 - Enhanced sexual assault informational materials distributed by the SPD

Scope of the Problem

- There are many facets to this problem:
 - Sexual assault is one of the most **under-reported** crimes
 - **Majority of cases are not prosecuted** for a variety of reasons
 - In 2018 in Springfield, out of 336 reported cases, 19 or 6% resulted in charges being filed
 - There are **many contributing factors** to lack of reporting and victim fallout:
 - Trauma itself
 - Shame, embarrassment
 - Victim-blaming
 - Victim fatigue - time it takes to prosecute the case
 - Criminal justice system not always educated in trauma-informed practices
 - Widespread lack of community awareness about the criminal justice system and victim rights

Scope of Work

- SATF met ten times from February – October 2019
- First two meetings were “listening” meetings
- Conducted debriefing session to identify priority areas for best practice research:
 - Data analysis and community education
 - Victim fallout
 - Offender accountability/judicial process

Work Groups & Research Topics

- Divided into three work groups to conduct literature review & best practice research
 - Group 1: Data and Education
 - Group 2: Victim “Fallout” and Victim Advocacy
 - Group 3: Offender Accountability & Judicial System

Key Findings & Recommendations

- Preface for findings & recommendations:
 - Foundational change is key to long-term success and changing social norms is key to foundational change
 - The recommendations coming out of this task force should drive foundational change
 - These recommendations will not be all encompassing – gaps will remain

Key Findings & Recommendations

- The overarching emphasis is on two key goals that will drive foundational change:
 1. Improve community awareness about sexual assault prevention, sexual assault reporting and victim rights
 2. Increase victim reporting & decrease victim fallout of the criminal justice system by improving the victim experience and improving outcomes for victims.

Key Findings & Recommendations

- Recommendation #1.
 - Appoint a qualified team to conduct a gaps analysis of sexual assault data collected within the private and public sectors and to conduct a community survey on attitudes and norms about sexual assault/sexual violence in Springfield.

Key Findings & Recommendations

- Recommendation #1 Rationale:
 - There is already good data being collected by various organizations which needs to be collected and analyzed from a systems perspective.
 - New survey data, along with collected/analyzed existing data, will help inform future response to sexual violence in our community.

Key Findings & Recommendations

- Recommendation #2:
 - Based on the data analysis and community survey, develop and implement a community education and awareness campaign to improve Springfield-area social norms regarding sexual violence.

Key Findings & Recommendations

- Recommendation #2 Rationale:
 - There are ample educational opportunities about sexual assault and trauma-informed approaches for victim service, healthcare and law enforcement professionals.
 - Education targeting the broader community, particularly, marginalized sectors, is not as abundant.
 - Education about sexual assault and victim rights is essential to improving reporting and reducing victim fallout.

Key Findings & Recommendations

- Recommendation #3
 - Collaborate to create a Springfield/Greene County integrated sexual violence court and implement ongoing educational opportunities about victims and trauma-centered practices.

Key Findings & Recommendations

- Recommendation #3 Rationale:
 - There is a need for law enforcement, GCPO, the court system and others to work together to improve offender accountability.
 - Research has shown that victim courts reduce victim re-traumatization and streamline the court process for victims and judicial staff, ultimately reducing victim fallout and improving outcomes.
 - There is a need for ongoing judicial education about trauma and trauma-centered approaches. A statewide initiative to require annual continuing judicial education in this would benefit victims throughout the state.

Key Findings & Recommendations

Additional thoughts on recommendation #3:

- The task force encourages City Council to facilitate opportunities for these agencies and groups to regularly work together for the improvement of the criminal justice system and the victim experience within it.
- Convening a quarterly or bi-annual meeting with members of law enforcement, GCPO, the judicial system and victim service organizations would be a good first step.
- Consider development of a semi-annual report card to the community.

Key Findings & Recommendations

- Recommendation #4:
 - The City of Springfield should continue to explore and pursue potential funding sources so that additional victim advocates can be imbedded within the Springfield Police Department to ensure that victims understand the process and their options and that victim rights are upheld throughout a trauma-informed, victim-centered process.

Key Findings & Recommendations

- Recommendation #4 Rationale:
 - Research has shown that victim advocates are valuable partners to law enforcements AND that victims who work with advocates are more likely to have police reports taken and less likely to have negative experiences with officers.
 - The recent OVW grant award is a significant first step but additional advocates are needed to ensure availability 24/7.

Key Findings & Recommendations

- Recommendation #5:
 - It is recommended that Springfield City Council include sexual assault initiatives as part of the annual legislative priorities that are taken forward to the Missouri Legislature each year.

Key Findings & Recommendations

- Recommendation #5 Rationale:
 - Some best-practices and leading-edge sexual assault initiatives are beyond the scope of local government and will require a statewide mandate.
 - In keeping with Council's desire that Springfield be a cutting-edge community with regard to addressing sexual assault, the City should be a leader in encouraging the pursuit of statewide legislative reforms and initiatives.

Final Remarks

- Members of the Sexual Assault Task Force thank City Council for their desire to reduce sexual assault crimes and their concern for victims in our community.
- We recognize this report is not all encompassing as it did not address the significant impact of domestic violence in sexual assault cases.
- We suggest that additional study and review of domestic violence in Springfield be considered as part of a continued effort to reduce the number of sexual assaults in our area.

Final Acknowledgements

- Greene County Prosecutor's Office
- Springfield Police Department
- Mercy Communities – Springfield
- Cox Health
- City of Springfield Clerks Office
- City of Springfield Public Information Office
- Springfield Public Schools
- Any and all others who participated in presenting information to the task force